Shoemaker Village

Volume 22-September 1998

The Knights of the Square Table continues with a dangerous twist!





Neighborhood News: Goat Invades Neighborhood! **PLUS** Special Report on Pioneer Road Project!

Massive Short Stories Section this month!
Shoemaker Village Introduces Live Chat on Refurbished Webpages!
Special Wedding Comedy section included this month!
DETAILS ON EDITOR'S PAGES!

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Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Welcome to the September issue of *Shoemaker Village*!

Yes, we realize that this issue, like the last, is late. This is due to a combination of factors, such as our publisher going on travel during our scheduled publication week, and a baseball game that was scheduled on the night of the due date. Due to an hour and 45 minute rain delay, the *Village* staff did not arrive home until 11:45 that night. Obviously, it was not feasible to stay up for ten more minutes to make final preparations to the *Village* at that time, so we were unable to publish that night. Due to the labor day holiday, the next available publication date was the first day of school, September 9.

Don't worry. We will be attempting to publish October's issue on time. Although we do not see any problems, we cannot anticipate the exact amount of homework that will be associated with the coming school year. Although from many sources it is said that there will be substantially less homework in the coming year, this is not always the case. We hope to have the October issue of *Shoemaker Village* published on Friday, September 26.

There is also good news this month: We have finally secured a deal to publish enlarged copies of the *Village*. Unfortunately, due to the high cost of publishing these days, we would request that our enlarged-copy subscribers donate $2.00 per month toward the *Village*. With your contribution, we can continue to provide this service to our visually handicapped subscribers.

We would like to announce that this month we have acquired a new subscriber: John Silvestri. John has agreed to contribute monthly articles on the Philadelphia Eagles during the football season. We would like to welcome John onto our staff and we hope that his work is greatly enjoyed!

In a sad note, Amanda Sandoski, who recently told us that she would be a regular contributor for the *Village*, has placed our Assistant Editor, Matthew Care on her /IGNORE list. We can only assume that this means the worst and that we have lost yet another of our staff. We hope that Amanda changes her mind in the future.

Recently, Sean Malseed, a former storywriter for the *Village*, attempted to pass a virus to hack into the *Village* account through AOL. The program in question was attached to a story that was sent to *Village* headquarters. When run, it sent the *Village* password to him, enabling him to send password solicitation messages to *Village* subscribers. Due to this, Sean has been permanently BANNED from the *Village* and all its components. Although almost everybody agrees that he was a great writer, it has been unanimously agreed that a threat to the *Village* like Sean cannot be ignored.

Recently, we have instituted a new program on our website: live chat! Every Thursday night, at 9:00 PM, the *Village* editors host a chat program on the *Village* website. Discussed are upcoming topics in the Discussion Forum, stories that are going to be contributed, inside looks at the *Village*, its production, and its content, and also just some "talk". Join us next Thursday, and we're sure that you'll have a good time! Also, on our

online world, we feature a huge comedy database with tons of jokes that will make you laugh hysterically. Give it a visit, and be sure to tell other people what a great site it is.

Robert and Amy Wilkowski, who we reported on last month, will be married on September 12. In honor of them, we have included a special section with tons of wedding comedy (4 pages!). We hope that they have a happy life together.

We have just relaunched the *Village* webpages yet again. This time, they feature expanded sections, extra comedy, and more. There is now a neighborhood news section that will feature the next month's news a full week before it is published in the *Village*. Online, you can also get up-to-date information on *The Knights of the Square Table*, version 3 of which is now available for downloading (Chapters 1 - 13). And to add a neat touch to the site, the pages will change color according to what time of day you enter. Visit our website at:

http://members.aol.com/shoevill

That's all for this month! Enjoy, as our proofreader calls it, "The Best Month of the Year!" We'll see you in October!

Acknowledgments

***Shoemaker Village* STAFF**

Editor Stephen Sokolowski

Assistant Editor Matthew Care

Proofreader Jean Sokolowski

Storywriters Matthew Care

John Silvestri

Publisher Henry Sokolowski

Steven Conway
Henry Sokolowski

This month's story contributors

Stephen Sokolowski
Matthew Care
Steven Conway
John Silvestri

New subscribers this month

John Silvestri

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Live chat on Thursday nights (9 PM EDT)
IRC Channel #ShoemakerVillage on irc.id-net.fr
Visit http://members.aol.com/shoevill/chat.html if you don't have an IRC client (or don't know what one is).

The next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be published on Friday, September 25, 1998.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Tuesday, September 22, 1998.
Enlarged copies of *Shoemaker Village* are generally published 7 to 10 days after the publication date.

Next month's topic in The Discussion Forum will be **OPEN TOPIC!**

Coming Next Issue

Volume 23--October 1998

Find out all that happened throughout September in neighborhood news, along with the latest in the Rorviks' goat incident and the Pioneer Road reconstruction!
The Discussion Forum is growing! With the open topic next month, it's a great chance to join!
The Knights of the Square Table continues!

ALL IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF *SHOEMAKER VILLAGE*!

Puzzle Page

TOPIC: *Shoemaker Village* website

N	E	I	G	H	B	O	R	H	O	O	D	P	Y	L
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Words

AOL
Applet
Back Issues
Browser
Chat
Color
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Comments
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Editor
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Marvelhall
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Navigation
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News
Novels
Search
ShoeVill
Subscribe
Thursday
Update
Village
Webmaster
Website

Neighborhood News

September 1998

UNUSUAL WEATHER TO CONTINUE THROUGH THE WINTER, FORECASTERS SAY

Unusual weather has been plaguing the area since the development of El Niño last year.

"It's been hot, but not excessively," neighbor Henry Sokolowski commented. "It could have been worse." Henry is referring to the summer, which as of this publication, had very few 90 degree days, the only big heat streak occurring in mid-July.

In early May, the area experienced 13 days of continual rain, one day shy of the all-time record of 14 days of rain in a row.

One big question many people are asking now is why leaves have been falling off trees in the area since late July. As explained to us earlier:

"During that big rain in the spring, the trees had a chance to grow big leaves because of all the rain. Then when the drought came in July, the trees couldn't hold all of those leaves because, to support all of them, they would need as much rain as in the spring. Therefore, some of the leaves are lost so that the rest can survive."

Henry also commented later during the interview, "This has been one weird year! All of these leaves keep dropping into the pool and creating algae so that we can't go in! I hope next year will be better!"

Grass was also hit hard by the drought, as shown in the following two pictures.

The first was taken on July 4, just before the start of the month-long drought. As you can see by the first picture, the grass was unusually green for that time of year.

The second photo was taken on August 11, the day before the first rain in a month. Because this area was under trees, this is not a good indication of the devastation that was wreaked on exposed grass.

To add to all of this, what was expected has occurred: the La Niña phenomenon has taken shape.

The opposite of El Niño, which occurs when the Pacific Ocean waters are superheated above normal levels, La Niña causes the ocean to cool, and the effects are just the opposite of El Niño.

You Compare: The Effect of the Drought



This picture was taken in early July, while the grass was still in good health.



This picture was taken just before the end of the drought.

Since there was less than 6 inches of measured snow last year (compared to the normal 40), La Niña is expected to bring more snow than normal to the area.

"I used to hate how the snow blocked up the roads and everything," said an anonymous source, "but since it's been three years since there's been any snow, I'm hoping that there will be lots of it." Many neighbors feel the same way.

No matter what happens this upcoming winter, *Shoemaker Village* will bring you the latest news.

STORM HITS AREA, CAUSING DAMAGE

Also just hours before publication, a damaging thunderstorm ravaged the area, causing damage.

The storm hit on Monday, September 7, while neighbor Henry Sokolowski was closing his pool down for the winter.

"The weather this year has been really weird", Henry said again. "It looked like the middle of fall after the storm."

The picture to the left was taken just minutes before the storm hit,



Henry Sokolowski and his son frantically attempted to close their pool before the storm hit.

as Henry and his son tried to close their pool. Notice the leaves that littered the ground, due to the high winds. It was estimated that they cleaned leaves out of the pool in 21 separate "rounds" before it was closed, in the course of an hour.

Heavy winds hit the area just as Henry finished, blowing construction barrels across the street, and debris over the area. Soon after, it began to rain.

"I'm just so glad I got it closed before the leaves came down. Otherwise, I would have had to clean it again, like after the storm in late June!"

SPECIAL REPORT

PIONEER ROAD RECONSTRUCTION CAUSES PROBLEMS

On Friday, August 14, 1998, there were several accidents along Pioneer Road.

That day, most of the road had already been torn up so that replacement curbing could be installed for residents who did not have curbing outside their houses. Along the side of the road, large ditches arose, threatening everyone who drove past, protected only by several barrels that marked their locations. However, many holes were unprotected and unmarked, as the following paragraph shows.



These trucks worked diligently from as early as 7:00 AM.

Around 4:15 that afternoon, a station wagon slammed into a ditch close to the railroad bridge. Traffic was backed up for hours after the incident, with part of the vehicle blocking one lane of the road.

This was sighted as the Assistant Editor's (Matthew Care) parents were offering Editor Stephen Sokolowski a ride home after he had ventured to Matthew's house for the day to work on the *Village*.

"That was to be expected, sooner or later," said critic Henry Sokolowski, who commented earlier on how long the construction project was taking to be completed. "Those holes were dangerous!"

At about the same time, a freight train derailed on the Byberry Road railroad bridge. The front of the train had somehow gripped onto the top of the bridge, leaving it hanging vertically, threatening to crush anyone who came close. Several police cars guarded the scene of the crash. At the top of Shoemaker Road, a police officer directed traffic, eliminating any chance to take pictures of the accident due to the difficulty of crossing the intersection.



Traffic lined Pioneer Road while the train derailment was cleared.

During the next week, neighbors complained of being awakened early as the huge trucks worked in the early morning hours, some saying as early as 7:00.

"I can't sleep late anymore," said neighbor Jean Sokolowski. "I look forward to the summer as a time when I don't have to get up early on my days off, but this construction has just about spoiled that aspect of vacation." The construction did not wake her son Christopher, however, who sleeps until 10:00 often.

For a few weeks recently, a large gap stretched across Pioneer Road in front of the Hoffman residence, wreaking havoc on passing cars. Henry Sokolowski, Jean's husband, reported sitting outside watching the passing cars for a while before the hole was later filled in with stones.

"That'll teach people to go slower on this road," he said. "Before this is over, someone is going to get a flat tire."

On Shoemaker road, Upper Moreland Police set up a speed trap. One patrol car with a

policeman manning a laser gun waited in the Kowalskis' driveway, first house from the large turn, on Shoemaker road. A large computerized sign was posted next to the police car that could be read after a car turned the corner.

Down the road, near Colony Drive, new curbing has been installed on the East side of the road. "I don't know how the people get up into their driveways," Henry complained. "They can't get over the curb when it's that high!" Later, stones were placed near the side of the road to provide a ramp for residents to ascend into their driveways.

Just before publication, John Rorvik came to *Village* headquarters to acquire Jean Sokolowski's signature on a petition that would lower the speed limit on Pioneer Road from the current limit of 35 MPH to 25.

"That's just what we need," said Jean. "These crazies zoom down the road as it is, and when it's paved, they'll be going 60!" The petition also asked for permission for Upper Moreland Police to use neighbors' driveways as speed traps.

Of course, the big question is: *When is all this finally going to be done?* According to Brian Mook, the township manager, the construction was originally scheduled to be completed before the school year began. However, due to troubles with one of the contractors working on the road, the finishing date is now expected to be in late October.

Until then, expect driving through the area to be a mess, with accidents and traffic plaguing the area. "I hope that it's done soon," Jean said. "I'm tired of all this construction!"

STRIKE LIKELY FOR UPPER MORELAND SCHOOLS

The Upper Moreland teachers were expected to call a strike on Tuesday, September 8, 1998, on the first inservice day of the school year.

The teachers may call a strike some time in early September, as one source told us hours before publication. According to him, the contract meeting "didn't go too well" on Tuesday, September 1.

According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Sunday, September 6, 1998, page B2), teachers will strike on Tuesday, because the next scheduled talk was not until Wednesday afternoon, the first day of school. Therefore, it is extremely likely that school will not be held on that day.

In state law, the maximum number of days teachers could strike is 8, because 180 school days must be completed by June 15.

According to Mr. Timothy Hoffman, who lives in the neighborhood, the teachers have been without a contract since June.

Lost and Found

RORVIKS' GOAT CONTINUES TO CAUSE PROBLEMS

On Thursday, September 3, as neighbor Jean Sokolowski pulled into her driveway after work, the Rorviks' goat was lying in wait in her front yard.

After seeing the goat, Jean jumped out of her car to escort it off her property.

At about the same time, Assistant Editor Matthew Care, who was updating the *Village* webpages in Jean's house, looked out the window just in time to take this picture.



The Rorviks' goat surprised Jean Sokolowski, who is seen here removing it from her property.

The red car in the background is suspected to belong to neighbor Lynne Johnston, a *Village* subscriber, who apparently backed up to Jean some support.

"I think it was hilarious," said Jean shortly after the incident. "Not that the goat was in my yard, but that I was pulling the goat away and this car stopped. At the time I had no idea who it was. But from looking at the picture, I can see that it was Lynne."

Christopher Sokolowski, her son, complained for hours after the incident.

Incidentally, he had fallen while running home from his friend Chad Gordon's house, scraping his knees, arms, and shoulders. "I was shaking. Luckily Steve [his brother] was inside to help me out. My mom wouldn't come in because of that stupid goat."

Termed "Goatgate" by neighbor Henry Sokolowski, the goat has been invading the neighborhood for months. On May 30, while Henry was working on installing a ceiling fan on his porch, the goat invaded, defecating all over his porch. The goat also ran toward neighbor Pat Altimari, forcing her to seek safety in her car.

"This poses a serious health risk," said Jean Sokolowski later after the comedic nature of the situation had worn off. "The goat was filthy!" Apparently the goat had been tied to a tree because he was dragging a rope with a branch caught in it. The police won't do anything, seemingly fed up with a deluge of phone calls complaining about the various escapades of the Rorvik animals. Obviously their numerous warnings to the Rorviks have gone unheeded.

Sports

EAGLES UPDATE
(Article contributed by John Silvestri)

Last Monday's game versus the Ravens can be summed up in one word.

Disaster.

Last year the Eagles season was a 6 win, 9 loss, and 1 tie season, with 7 losses and 1 tie away from home. This is why the team was desperate for this preseason win. The Eagles coaches even developed a new travel plan to get the team to focus more on the game by getting to the stadium early and checking out the stadium before the game. Apparently this didn't help the Eagles overall performance one bit.

The Eagles scored only two field goals and no touchdowns all day. Having two turnovers at the beginning and at the end of the first half, Bobby Hoying's 61 total yards passing, and nine yards of total running in two and a half quarters, the Eagles need to work hard in training camp. And the worst news is that the regular season starts on September 6th. Not too much time to train.

On Monday, after the Ravens kicked their first field goal and on the Eagles' first play of the game, Kevin Turner fumbled the ball then the Ravens recovered and scored a touchdown. Ten points for the Ravens in less than thirty seconds.

On Saturday, August 29 the Eagles go to New England for a road game against the Patriots.

In other Eagles news:

Wide receiver Chris T. Jones was cut from the team on Aug. 19 after his '97 season knee injury healed too slowly.

Mike Macula probably won't return due to a season-ending knee ligament injury. Next year he becomes a free agent.

Sources - Watching the Baltimore, Philadelphia game, The Record, and online sources.

Humor from the Village Square

In our great tradition of honoring people who are celebrating special occasions, *Shoemaker Village* has compiled a column of wedding jokes specially made for Robert Wilkowski and Amy Ott, who will be married on September 12.

A COLLECTION OF WEDDING ONE-LINERS
A coward is a hero with a wife, kids, and a mortgage.

A gentleman is one who never swears at his wife while ladies are present.

A husband is living proof that a wife can take a joke.

A husband is what's left of the lover after the nerve has been extracted.

A man must marry only a very pretty woman in case he should ever want some other man to take her off his hands.

A White House well filled, a little peanut field well tilled, and a wife who will go to the Bronx are great riches.

Ah Mozart! He was happily married - but his wife wasn't.

An archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have; the older she gets, the more interested he is in her.

And I shall love thee still my dear, Until my wife is wise.

Bachelor: the only man who has never told his wife a lie.

Bride: A woman with a fine prospect of happiness behind her.

By all means marry. If you get a good wife, you'll be happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher.

Correction: Instead of being arrested, as we stated, for kicking his wife down a flight of stairs and hurling a lighted kerosene lamp after her, the Rev. James P. Wellman died unmarried four years ago.

Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka: Words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father or brother was killed, wounded, or reported missing in action. -- Catch-22

Diplomat: A man who can convince his wife she would look stout in a fur coat.

Don't marry for money; you can borrow it cheaper.

English Law prohibits a man from marrying his mother-in-law. This is our idea of useless legislation.

Feminists are OK. I just wouldn't want my sister to marry one.

He who knows nothing, knows nothing. But he who knows he knows nothing knows something. And he who knows someone whose friend's wife's brother knows nothing, he knows something. Or something like that.

Here lies my wife in earthy mold/when she lived did naught but scold. Good friends go softly in your walking/lest she should wake and rise up talking.

Honolulu - it's got everything. Sand for the children, sun for the wife, sharks for the wife's mother. -- Ken Dodd

Husband: a man who buys his football tickets four months in advance and waits until December 24 to do his Christmas shopping.

I am in total control, but don't tell my wife.

I belong to Bridegrooms Anonymous. Whenever I feel like getting married, they send over a lady in a housecoat and hair curlers to burn my toast for me. -- Dick Martin

I think of my wife and I think of Lot, and I think of the lucky break he got.

I've been asked to say a couple of words about my husband, Fang. How about 'short' and 'cheap'? -- Phyllis Diller

I've been trying desperately to save my marriage for the last 35 years.

If all men were brothers, would you let one marry your sister?

If you are afraid of loneliness, do not marry. -- Chekhov

If you never want to see a man again, say, “I love you, I want to marry you, I want to have children...” -- Rita Rudner

If your wife wants to learn how to drive, don't stand in her way.

In marriage, as in war, it is permitted to take every advantage of the enemy.

In marriage, the bride gets a shower. But for the groom, it's curtains!

Jimmy Carter as President is like Truman Capote marrying Dolly Parton. The job is just too big for him. -- Rich Little

Joint Checking Account: a handy little device which permits my wife to beat me to the draw.

Long engagements give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which is never advisable. -- Oscar Wilde

Losing a wife can be hard. In my case it was almost impossible.

Love thy neighbor, but make sure her husband is away first.

Love: An obsessive delusion that is cured by marriage.

Man and wife make one fool.

Many a wife thinks her husband is the world's greatest lover. But she can never catch him at it.

Marriage is a matter of give and take, but so far I haven't been able to find anybody who'll take what I have to give. -- Cass Daley

Marriage is a mutual relationship if both parties know when to be mute.

Marriage is a rest period between romances.

Marriage is a three ring circus: engagement ring, wedding ring, and suffering.

Marriage is a trip between Niagara Falls and Reno.

Marriage is an institution - but who wants to live in an institution?

Marriage is bliss. Ignorance is bliss. Ergo...

Marriage is like a hot bath. Once you get used to it, it's not so hot.

Marriage is like a mousetrap. Those on the outside are trying to get in. Those on the inside are trying to get out.

Marriage is low down, but you spend the rest of your life paying for it.

Marriage is not a word; it is a sentence.

Marriage is the process of finding out what kind of man your wife would have preferred.

Marriage is the sole cause of divorce.

Marriage means commitment. Of course, so does insanity.

Marriage still confers one very special privilege - only a married person can get divorced.

Marriage: A ceremony in which rings are put on the finger of the lady and through the nose of the gentleman. -- Herbert Spencer

Marriage: the only sport in which the trapped animal has to buy the license.

Marry not a tennis player. For love means nothing to them.

May you be too good for the world and not good enough for your wife.

May you grow so rich your widow's second husband never has to worry about a living, God forbid.

May you live happily ever after with a poor, ugly, shrewish wife.

May you never leave your marriage alive.

May your wife be a witch who takes after her mother, and may you all live together in a one-room house.

Men have a much better time of it than women; for one thing, they marry later; for another thing, they die earlier. --H.L. Mencken

My darling wife was always glum. I drowned her in a cask of rum, And so made sure that she would stay, In better spirits night and day.

My opinions are my wife's, and she says I'm lucky to have them.

My other wife is beautiful.

My wife doesn't care what I do away from home, as long as I don't enjoy it.

My wife has a split personality, and I hate both of them.

My wife ran off with my best friend last week. Gawd, I miss him!

My wife says if I go fishing one more time she's going to leave me. Gosh, I'm going to miss her.

My wife submits and I obey; she always lets me have her way.

Never be unfaithful to a lover, except with your wife. -- PJ O'Rourke

No man should marry until he has studied anatomy and dissected at least one woman. -- Honore de Balzac

Nothing says lovin' like marrying your cousin! -- Al Bundy

Nuns: Women who marry God. If they divorce Him, do they get half the universe?

Second marriage is the triumph of hope over experience.

Shotgun wedding: a case of wife or death.

Spinster: A bachelor's wife.

Suicide is belated acquiescence in the opinion of one's wife's relatives.

Ted Kennedy: “Where was George?” Answer: Dry, sober, and at home with his wife

The days just before marriage are like a snappy introduction to a tedious book.

The difference between marriage and death? Dead people are free.

The husband who wants a happy marriage should learn to keep his mouth shut and his checkbook open. -- Groucho Marx

The most happy marriage I can imagine to myself would be the union of a deaf man to a blind woman. -- S. T. Coleridge

The only one of your children who does not grow up and move away is your husband.

The theory used to be you marry an older man because they are more mature. The new theory is that men don't mature. So you might as well marry a younger one.

There's a way of transferring funds that is even faster than electronic banking. It's called marriage. -- James Holt McGavran

This delivery driver carries no money. His wife has it all.

We in the industry know that behind every successful screenwriter stands a woman. And behind her stands his wife. -- Groucho Marx

We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart. -- H.L. Mencken

What's new? Most of my wife.

When a man steals your wife, there is no better revenge than to let him keep her. -- Guitry

When Baby's cries grew hard to bear / I popped him in the Frigidaire. I never would have done so if / I'd known that he'd be frozen stiff. / My wife said “George, I'm so unhappy! / Our darling's now completely frappe!” -- Graham

When marriage is outlawed, only outlaws will have inlaws.

Why bother with marriage? Just find a woman you hate and buy her a house.

Wife: The perfect acquisition for any gentleman feeling himself to have excessive control over his personal affairs.

You will marry into an Indian tribe and become one big Hopi family.

All marriages are happy - it's the living together afterward that causes all the problems.

Did you hear about the scientist whose wife had twins? He baptized one and kept the other as a control.

DISCLAIMER: Even my wife doesn't agree with everything I say, and she loves me dearly. My employers don't love me nearly as much as she does. Draw your own conclusions.

It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle marry one another and so make only two people miserable instead of four, besides being very amusing.

May you be blessed with a wife so healthy and strong, she can pull the plow when your horse drops dead.

May you learn to perform miracles: earn a living and marry off your daughters.

May your clock run slow, your heart fast, your bile over, your wife away, your nose always.

May your daughters marry men of substance: gypsies with two bears.

Sign in a marriage counselor's window: “OUT TO LUNCH - THINK IT OVER.”

The gods gave man fire and he invented fire engines. They gave him love and he invented marriage.

To heck with marrying a girl who makes biscuits like her mother - I want to marry one who makes

dough like her father.

I had some words with my wife, and she had some paragraphs with me.

Pressure on Today's Students

With the new school year to begin soon, it is interesting to look back at the last year and discover the immense pressure that is expected of today's students in schools.

Of course, the most important of all of these is homework. Although homework to an extent can help the student learn important concepts and reinforce learning that took place in the classroom, excessive homework does nothing but make the student to which it is assigned hate homework, and eventually school altogether. There are multiple surveys that have been published, all of which say that students who like school more will learn more in the classroom. (You don't need surveys to figure that out.)

Another pressure on students is peer pressure. Although people make a really big deal about peer pressure, and parents tell their children to be themselves, I have never experienced this aspect of school. I am not saying that it does not exist, just that it exists to a much lesser extent than what was once thought. To my knowledge, I can only point out one instance where I saw this occur. Teachers should stop worrying about things like peer pressure and more about discipline, which is a major problem in schools today.

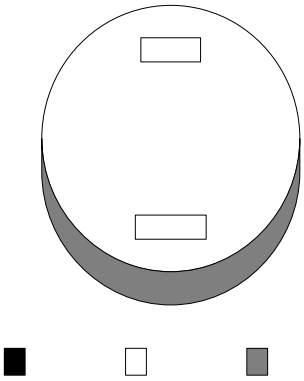
As you can see, these two major pressures make up a major part of a student's life.

Summer Vacation: Is it Really Worth It?

In June I composed a piece on how the current system of education was not working by allowing students off for two and a half months in the summer. At the time, most people, who were looking forward to the summer and its advantages, were influenced by its impending greatness. Now, however, the summer is almost over, and people begin asking questions like "Was it worth it?" and "Did I make the most out of my summer?".

The editors at *Shoemaker Village* recently conducted a poll, questioning students on if they were looking forward to returning to school. While only two months ago everybody would be complaining, the answer right now is an emphatic "Yes!"

As shown by the graph on the left, it was split in half between students who were looking forward to going back to school completely and those who had some regrets. However, we met **nobody** (of course, the Editors were not included in the survey as not to affect the results) who completely answered "no".



What does this mean? If students, after two months, have changed their minds so greatly about school, then something, somewhere, must be wrong. Many people interviewed also included that they were "bored."

Notice that I put "bored" in quotation marks. It is my belief that no matter how hopeless it seems, there is always something to do. Most people describe "bored" as having nothing to do, but in reality they mean that there is nothing fun to do. Think about this. Somewhere, I heard that there are several major

reasons for drug use. Curiosity, opportunity, peer pressure, boredom..., maybe that's one of the reasons that my family has found cigarette butts on the street corner several times recently. It also is logical to apply the same principles to crime.

But in this area, this is not as much of a problem as in the inner city. So let's face it: If you are a student reading this essay, think about this:

Calculating the current number of days in the school year (186) and the number of days off in the summer, we come up with the following. There could be either: a "three week on, one week off" scenario, or some other variant, such as six weeks on and two weeks off. This includes the current Christmas and Easter vacation weeks. I myself prefer the former, but anything would be better than the current way. Don't you ever wish that, when there was snow on the ground but not enough to miss school, you could just stay home and go sledding or build an igloo, or ....?

Don't get me wrong on this issue: there are some people who believe that students should attend school year round WITHOUT any extra vacation (like the go-to-school-on-Saturdays drive a few years ago). This would only make things worse than they already are.

Matthew Care, the Assistant Editor, disagrees. He believes that we should continue to deal with the ancient system where students were let off in the summer because they had to work on their father's seventeenth-century farm. I hope to be seeing his rebuttal to his own peers' opinions soon.

Yet Another Memorable Experience

by Matthew Care

It was the Friday before my family was to leave on vacation. We had taken advantage of one of those dirt-cheap offers that travel agencies send out. There was much to be done in preparation for the trip and my dad was especially outspoken (hyper) about what needed to be done.

I had arranged to spend the day with Stephen Sokolowski at my house. He came over at about 11:00. During the day we worked on the *Village*. The plan was for him to go home about 4 or 5:00. Some time during the day I found out that my parents had made plans to meet my grandmother, aunt, and uncle for dinner somewhere between home and Baltimore. At 3:30 my parents started riding my case about getting ready to go to dinner. I found that I had no nice pants and was forced to wear jeans. I felt really dumb doing so. I know a casual look is more acceptable now-a-days in restaurants, but I felt like a cowboy and that made me want to punch myself.

I got ready and we rushed out of the house a little later than we probably should have. On the way to Steve's house, at a major intersection, there was an overturned truck and traffic was backed up a great deal. Then as we crawled onto Pioneer Road, which was still heavily under construction, we saw a series of police cars around another car which had run into a ditch in the side of the road. Traffic was still going in both directions but very slowly and with great difficulty. We dropped Steve off as close to his house as we could get without turning into his street. We turned down Shoemaker and got onto some main road.

The trip was underway and it shouldn't have taken more than an hour and a quarter. Due to traffic it took much longer and I was feeling ill. All the way down I was plagued by nausea, headache, and a bitter resentment for the whole expedition. When we arrived at the meeting place, Longwood Inn, I felt somewhat better. We went into the building and did not see the rest of our party anywhere. There was no record of a reservation and no one had seen them come in. Deciding to have a drink in the small vacant bar, we waited for them. I was still hostile to my parents and did not drink anything. As we sat, my mom and dad quietly discussed the apparent decline of the establishment. The bar tender explained that he was

the only person there. There was no other help and he had to do it all. We even learned that they didn't usually use the dining room anymore. It was only used for parties and large groups. But since he wasn't about to turn us away, we would be seated. After about 10 minutes our relatives walked in. At the sight of my grandmother, aunt, and uncle I suddenly felt much better and my spirits improved.

The dishevelment of the business was worse than we thought. We could not have a menu because there were none to give. Before entering the dining room we chose what we wanted from a menu board outside. Only six items were being offered including lobster which I had long wanted to try. It had been flown in fresh that morning and was very reasonably priced. It was over a pound for under twenty dollars.

Throughout the evening we were seated, served, and bussed, by the bar tender. I sat next to my aunt so she could coach me on the proper way to eat lobster, as this was my first time. It was very good and given the chance, I'd get it again. Lobster is an excellent conversation food because it requires so much work to get your fill. This is a good thing in my mind because that way you're not constantly stuffing your face and you really get the chance to enjoy it.

Dinner was excellent. The only choice of dessert was some sort of ice cream that resembled spumoni. It was very good and very chocolatey. Conversation continued for a good twenty minuets after everyone finished eating. I'm not sure how it came about but we found out that Longwood Gardens was having a fireworks show that night. Tickets were required to get in. But as usual, no formality like that would deter my dad from getting in. It would have been the perfect after-dinner activity, but unfortunately it never happened...

We went to our separate cars and my grandmother, aunt, and uncle followed my dad out to Longwood Gardens. His experience as a bus driver and his having been there many times before led us to a deserted parking lot and adjoining picnic area. Our cars pulled up beside each other and we tried to figure out the plan. No sooner did my dad say, “Well, we can stay until the cops chase us out...” than a 4x4 with a blinking light on top drove up and a man “informed” us that the picnic area was closed and we

had to leave right away. We turned around and, with our last goodbyes having been implied by a series of glances, we parted ways and drove to our respective homes. I felt fine. Dinner had settled and I started to write this story in the car.

The Bookbag Baffler

By Steven Conway

It was a rainy day in April. High school sophomore Larry Bundy was in his fifth period algebra class. Today's lesson was going to be on parabolas and the kids needed their graphing calculators. For some unknown reason, Larry couldn't find his bookbag. He asked the two kids on either side of him if they knew where his bookbag was, but they had no clue. Larry asked the teacher if he could go to his previous classes and look for his bookbag and the teacher said he could. Unfortunately, his search came up empty handed. This was awkward because he very rarely lost anything. He was sitting between John Davis, who is in detention more days than not, and Bob Schmidt, who has been his best friend for ten years. They are the only people that could have pulled off the prank. Larry had his bookbag for the first four periods of the day and he brought it into algebra class. He had no clue why he couldn't find it now. There was a good chance somebody stole it. He borrowed a calculator from the teacher for the day in hopes to get his bookbag back by class tomorrow. The bell rang at the end of class and Larry wanted to have a conversation with John and Bob before the start of sixth period.

“John and Bob, can I have a word with you?” queried Larry.

“Sure,” said Bob. “What do you want to talk about?”

“I want to talk about my stolen bookbag. I brought it with me to Algebra class and put it down only for a moment. I bent down to get my graphing calculator out of my bookbag and it was gone. I'm not accusing anybody of anything, but I think it was one of you two. I'm leaning toward John because my bookbag was closer to him and he gets in trouble quite often.”

“Wait a minute, Larry. I know I have been in trouble many times before, but don't blame me for this one. Yes your bookbag was closer to me, but how do we know that Bob did not take it,” noted John.

“Hold your horses, John. I have known Larry for ten years. Do you actually think for a *second* that I would bring harm to my best comrade?” said Bob. “What about last week when you got three days detention for stealing a freshman's bookbag?”

“I only wanted some lunch money,” replied John hesitantly as he slowly walked away from Bob and Larry. After he got some distance between himself and the other two, the walk grew into a quick dash.

Immediately after John was out of sight, the bell rang for the start of sixth period and Larry got pretty much nowhere. The only answer he got was John stole a bookbag last week and got caught. It is possible that Larry found out how bad stealing bookbags was and wouldn't do it again. On the other hand, Bob wouldn't do such a thing. Why would his best friend try to deceive him like that? Is it possible that somebody else did it that he didn’t know about? The answer to that question would be no because there wasn't enough time for something like that to happen. Nevertheless, he had to consider all the possibilities.

After dinner that night, Larry decided to go to his room and think. He knew that somebody was not telling the truth, but who? Larry didn't want to get back at the person who pilfered his bookbag. He just wanted the satisfaction of getting his bookbag back into his hands.

The next day, he went back to school with the hope of getting his bookbag back. He did not find it through the first four periods of the day and had to go back to Algebra with nothing on his back. Unfortunately, he had to borrow another graphing calculator. When he borrowed it, the teacher said he could keep it until he finds his own. After class, he wanted to talk to Bob and John one more time.

“Did either one of you find my bookbag last night at your houses?” interrogated a worried Larry looking for a “yes” response.

“I searched my house from top to bottom, but I couldn't find your bookbag anywhere,” replied Bob as his hands were trembling because he didn't want to be late for his sixth period class two days in a row.

“I did the same thing last night, but I too came up empty handed,” said a most confident John.

“I do not know why I say this, but I think one of you is lying,” said Larry. “I do not want to name names right now. I think we should all get to our sixth period class.”

That night, Larry went up to his room again to do some heavy duty thinking about the events that transpired that day. All he had to do was figure out who was not telling the truth. Unfortunately, that job was easier said than done. He had no proof or leads from either one of the two suspects that they were the culprit. Maybe the third day that he has been without a bookbag will be the charm to finding out who committed the crime.

Larry went back to school the next day hoping to find his precious bookbag near his locker or in a room that he goes to during the day. He did not find it through the first four periods and had to go back to the infamous fifth period Algebra class with Bob and John. Lucklessly, nobody came forth with any information until the end of class.

“Larry, can I speak with you for a moment?” asked a nervous Bob who wanted to get this information off his chest.

“Sure, but make it quick because I want to get to my sixth period class a couple minutes before the bell today,” responded Larry.

“I have your bookbag at my house,” said Bob, “because I saw you had a shiny and new graphing calculator and I wanted to try it out. However, I didn't know how to use it and I think I broke it.”

“Why didn't you just tell me this right away? I am sure you did not break it. You probably just pushed a wrong button. I can't believe you did such an awful thing because you are my BEST friend. I expected John to do something like this because he is a troublemaker; not you. I do not want you as a friend anymore. You are going to have to turn yourself in at some point.”

“I am going to do it right now. I am sorry I befriended you,” said a melancholy Bob.

When Bob turned himself in, he was immediately expelled from school for stealing Larry's bookbag. Larry apologized to John the minute he got a chance for wrongly accusing him and they have been friends ever since.

Terror On The Back-9

By Matthew Care

I pressed through the dense fog and suddenly I was falling, falling, falling...

I don't remember hitting the ground, but I staggered to my feet and looked around. I was standing in a vast field of grass. The field extended forever in one direction and was enclosed on the sides by massive breathtaking walls of stone. Just as I turned around, the black vortex that brought me here disappeared and all there was was more stone.

I didn't know how I got here, and I didn't know exactly what would become of me, but strangely I knew exactly what I had to do as if I were destined to take this journey. The only way to go was forward. I began walking through the field. The grass was the deepest green I'd ever seen and it came up to my ankles. Ahead of me was a hill. I started to climb. The incline was gradual but tiring. It seemed to go on forever. When at last I reached the top, I turned around and looked back down in triumph. I was tired but knew I could not rest. I started to walk back down the slightly steeper side of the hill, but lost my footing and fell. I started to roll down the hill. Faster and faster I went, the world spinning past me. Deciding to go limp and make the best of it, I started going faster yet. On one pass I caught myself looking forward down the hill and in a split second appeared the ominous black vortex.

Gaining speed and momentum, I tumbled toward the swirling mass. If I could have stopped I surely would have. But I was unable to so much as slow myself. Putting out my arms and legs to slow myself I continued to roll awkwardly down the incline. Helplessly I rolled toward it. Knowing there to be no hope of avoiding it, I first felt terrified, but then got the same strange feeling that I did before. It was as if I had no choice in the matter at all. I was going straight for it. Just where the bottom of the hill would be, the mass awaited. I rolled right into it. Then the same swirling feeling.

When I came around I was looking down a field exactly like the one I was just in. At first I thought I'd been transported right back to the beginning of my journey. But that notion quickly passed as I noticed a difference. I knew it was sunny yet I was standing in the shade. I looked up only to see I was

standing in someone's shadow! Fifty feet in front of me stood a huge man: a pirate 100 times my size. Wearing black boots, a long coat, and a tri-corner hat, he looked right at me with his one eye and pointed his long blunt sword at me. I don't know how he knew I was there. I was sure that I was too small to see. He made no movements. Did not speak, did not redirect his glance, did nothing. Stood there like an immovable object. Something told me I had to pass him. I started walking. When I got about twenty feet from him I stopped a second and then started to sprint. He cocked his head just a little and raised his sword in the air pointing it at the ground. In a flash the rapier started coming down, straight down. Just as I dashed through his legs it came down right behind me and pierced the ground. I ran a hundred feet without looking back. I stopped to catch my breath. Panting, I turned around. The pirate did not pursue or even turn. Looking straight on, he pulled the sword from the ground and raised it up to the original striking position. He became a statue again, immovable.

I moved on. I could see something a long ways away. As I got closer, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was a giant penguin, at least 20 times my size. There wasn't enough space between his legs to go through this time. He did even less than the man. In a bowing motion he bent over a little and looked at me. Then he straightened up again and didn't move. I went around him, a simple task. I looked up now and again, expecting him to lift his flipper up and squash me, but he did nothing and I passed uneventfully. Still looking at the two obstacles behind me, I walked backwards for a minute or two. When I faced forward I nearly died of surprise. The stone walls had grown closer together, narrowing the field, and in my path was an alligator. It didn't more either.

“Aren't there any things that move here!” I screamed.

It just lay there flat on the ground with its mouth open--bottom jaw on the ground and top jaw raised in the air like a hinged lid.

“Oh no,” I said, “you don't want me to...”

But it did. I knew what I had to do. I didn't know how I knew. I didn't know how I knew any of the things I did. I just did. Slowly at first and gathering speed I walked into its mouth. It was dark,

moist, and I bet that if I'd opened my mouth to speak, there would have been an echo. The...well, not floor, but whatever it was, was solid. Finally, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. I emerged under a great tail. I had walked through and come right out of its...you know...

I climbed the hill in front of me. It was the steepest one yet. I knew the end was near. I came to the top of the hill. The way down was cut and dry. No hill--just a straight vertical drop off of a cliff. Below was only one thing. The swirling vortex waited for me. It stretched on as far as I could see in front of me and to the side. There might as well have been a sign that said, "you have no choice," printed and stuck in the ground by the edge of the land. This was it. I jumped off the edge and did a perfect belly flop into the mass. Total darkness. I felt as if I were floating but at the same time as if I were being crushed in a total vacuum. Time slowed down. It felt like only a second, but at the same time, like a millennium. Then I saw the light.

I sat up. Looked in the air and saw the same sun, the same clouds, but something was different. I was about to stand up and scream curses at God, when I realized that I wasn't in that place. I stood up and turned in a full circle. There, in front of me, was the 18th hole of the miniature golf course in my town. The same course I'd spent every day that summer at, perfecting my putting.

"Darn, I forgot to take my medicine this morning," I thought to myself. I picked up my putter which was laying next to me when I came to.

"Hum, could have used you then," I said to it.

I walked by the sign-in window and handed it to the man inside the shack.

"Thanks, Luke," I said. "See you tomorrow."

Titanic

by Matthew Care

Tuesday, April 22, 1912

Dear Cousin Tony,

I was not positive at first that I wanted to write to you. But I thought I should let my loved ones know I am alive and well. As you may know, the ship I was on, The Titanic, sunk close to a week ago. Perhaps you have seen the articles in the newspaper. Do not believe them. The lucky ones were rescued and brought to New York. I wish you were here, so I could slug you. It was you who told me I should take The Titanic back to America, but I digress. I am well. My trip to France on The Olympic was fine. While in France I met some interesting people. I hooked up with a man who kept on saying that he was looking for a gentleman

like myself to work for him in his establishments in America. The return voyage was quite nice. I was well-tended to by the crew. The food was excellent. The ship was a dream boat. First class was very nice. I occasionally indulged in a game of squash or spent some time in the pool. Also with me in First Class were some of the associates of the man I met in France. I asked them to elaborate on the job they were offering me. "What is it that you do?" I said. They said they were in the field of "non-mutual wealth". I didn't know what it meant at the time. Everything was going fine until the night of the 14th.

At 11:00 I was just finishing up a hot lemonade and gin. I then decided to return to my state room and retire. It had been a relaxing day. I had taken a dip in the pool and spent some time with other first class men playing cards. Anyway, the last thing I had on my mind was a fear of The Titanic sinking. I had just spent a nice day on the "unsinkable ship" and I was ready for a peaceful night. But fate had an ulterior plan for, about 40 minutes later, when most passengers were fast asleep, the lookout spotted an iceberg and the ship was taking a sharp turn to avoid it.

At around 12:10 I was awakened by a knock at my door. A stewardess told me to dress and put on my life belt and proceed to the boat deck. Like many, I was not worried. I thought it was just a drill or

maybe just a mandatory precaution. But something else deep, deep inside me felt something was not right. There was something strange about that night and I could feel it. So, thinking that it would not be any more of a burden to take some things with me, I dressed warmly and took another sweater with me. I stuffed 2 oranges in my pocket. I got a very small bottle of liquor and took a last look around the room. There was a small silver box on the table full of money. I turned, left the room, and started toward the big staircase that led to the boat deck. When I got there, the deck was swamped. I found a crewman who, with half his attention, told me that women and children were being loaded into boats and that men would not be allowed on for quite a while. He told me that I should find a line and get in it. At what I think was 1:10 or so, some men, of which I was one, were loaded into lifeboat No. 10. At 1:15 the boat was lowered. I was in charge of one of the oars. At this time The Titanic had been firing rockets for some time. From the boat, we could see the Titanic's stern swing up in the air and the ship stand on end in the water. We rowed away quickly. It is said if you do not, you will get sucked into a vortex of water when the ship goes down. After some time, another man replaced me at the oar. I took a swig of liquor now and then and ate one of my oranges. I thought I should save the other one since we did not know how long we would be stranded. But, soon I offered it to a hungry little boy. I considered myself lucky to have gotten off at all, so I thought I should at least be a gentleman. After two hours of drifting and rowing, we saw some rockets over the horizon. This lifted all of our spirits some. After another half-hour we saw a ship on the horizon. At first we were afraid the ship would not see us and run us down. But, the ship slowed down and showed sign that they were going to help. The ship was the Carpathia. They had opened a door in the side of the ship and they soon started to bring up people. They lowered down ladders, but some women and children were brought up in bags, so to speak. They made accommodations for us and put us to bed. Five days later we arrived in New York. I found a hotel, and that is where I am now. There is something on my mind. We have been looking for a new place to live that is in the city and is closer to our other family in Boston. What if we moved to New York? Those men I met in France survived the crash and I have taken their job offer. Right now I am making plans to go back to Baltimore

to see you. We will talk more then.

Sincerely,

Matthew Care

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 13

Katie stepped out of the light. Immediately, there was a bright flash. The stones that were lying in the center of the light began to shine brighter, just for a second, and suddenly the white light was gone. It disappeared out of thin air. A split second after that, the three lights where the towers had once stood winked out once and for all. An eerie silence spread out over the field.

Everybody gasped, staring at Katie. Instead of her, there stood a ten foot tall monster, with glowing red hands.

"What happened?" she asked. Suddenly, without warning, a stream of flames shot out from her arms, into the crowd of knights that surrounded her. They dispersed, and watched in awe as the stream burnt the grass that was around them. As suddenly as it began, it stopped a few seconds later.

"Wait, I think..." Katie began, and suddenly there was a flash. In front of them now stood Katie, just as she had looked a minute ago, before she stepped into the light.

"What was that?" Dave asked, more curious than scared. Mike repeated the question when Katie didn't answer right away.

"She turned into the fire elemental," Christopher said with a look on his face that said that he was dead serious.

"The power..." Katie gasped, and then fell to the ground.

It was mid-afternoon. After careful examination, Christopher assessed that Katie would be alright, because she had just fainted, but would wake up soon. Mike continued to marvel at how, without the help of modern medicine, the people of this world were able to keep others healthy.

They had hoisted Katie on to a horse, and tied her down so that she wouldn't fall off. Dave rode on the front of the horse as an extra precaution.

They were traveling north, to a town that Sean had found by using a map he had. This town would be able to restock them, and prepare them for the long journey into Yavin's realm. However, they were low on supplies, and they had to survive for at least three days with only one meager meal a day. Several times Sean had debated whether to give up and return, or to continue, but the closeness of the town compared to his home had made the decision for him.

Katie awoke around 4:00, while they were crossing a large field. The few deciduous trees were beginning to thin, leaving only sparse pines in between. They had covered a lot of ground that day due to the abiding weather and the flat terrain. It was suggested by Sean that they travel as far as they could by dusk, which now wasn't that far away.

When it had begun to get dark, the large group of knights stopped in a small grove of trees to rest for the night.

"What happened back there?" Dave asked Katie as soon as they had dismounted. Mike was present, the last rays of the sun disappearing behind him.

"I..I.. don't really know," she replied.

"Come on! You were transformed into some kind of creature," Dave exclaimed. "You must know!"

"I don't! It was as if I wasn't myself when I walked into the light. I can't remember anything about it. The next thing I remembered is when I woke up on the horse."

"Can you do it again?" Dave asked.

"No. It probably only happens when I'm in the light. Anyway, the light is gone and so are the towers, so I won't have to worry about that again."

"You might if we get to Yavin's tower," Christoper interrupted, walking towards them, just within earshot. When he had arrived, he said, "I think that you may be the lost fire elemental."

"That's not possible," Katie said. "I'm not even from this world!"

"Then maybe that's why you're here," Christopher said.

"What do you mean?" Katie said, uneasily.

"Well, you might have been brought here, by some reason, to save our world and return peace."

"I never thought of that," Dave said. "But now that I think of it, it makes sense."

Katie looked around. Christoper and Chapin were staring at her, like she belonged to their group. But that couldn't be, it was only a few months since she had even heard of this world. She shrugged at them and said, "I don't, I mean I guess." There was silence.

As suddenly as the awkward question had arisen, Christoper said, "Well, I'd better be getting to bed. See you later." Chapin nodded, and followed Christoper.

"What was that all about?" Dave demanded.

"How should I know?" Katie replied.

"Lately, Christoper and Chapin have been acting like they need us for something. Maybe it's just this fire elemental stuff, but I kind of get the feeling that they're *using us*."

"We'd better watch out for signs that they are," Mike said. "But anyway, we should go to sleep now and we'll worry about it later."

"Yeah, I'm tired," Dave said. Quickly, they lied down and fell asleep without another word. The cold, hard ground was uncomfortable and they were awoken many times during the night.

When the morning finally came, it was dark and dreary yet again. It wasn't raining, but by the time that everybody had gathered their belongings, it had begun to. Even though many of the knights had heavy blankets that sheltered then from the rain, all of them were soaked after an hour. When it was clear that they were going to make no progress that day, they stopped for a rest under a few sparce trees.

It was the same for the next few days, and they were terribly behind schedule and out of food by the time that they stood just a mile away from the gates of the town, they were exhausted, famished, and dehydrated. It took all of their effort to walk the final mile through the blazing sun. It was the hottest it had been in a while, and that was saying a lot for how far north they were, and it being near the end of August.

When they reached the gates of the town, two soldiers stood guard along with sentries in the tops of the towers.

"Halt, travelers!" one hollered. "What is your business here?"

"We need supplies!" Sean yelled back. "We are weary travelers, on our way to make a stand against Yavin!"

The guards paused for a minute, and without another word to the knights, looked at his fellow guard, and appeared to discuss something with him.

"Only fools would try to fight Yavin!" the guard yelled back.

"We aren't fools!" Sean replied. "We have help and are just-" Suddenly, there was a loud explosion, and a spear hurtled toward the knights.

"Great!" Sean cursed. "These idiots are fighting against people on their own side!"

"Return the attack!" Sean said to a group of knights in the front. "The rest of you, stay out of range!" The rest of the knights fell back from the hurtling spears and torches. Soon the grass in front of them was afire, threatening to envelop the party.

"Hurry, DO SOMETHING!" Dave yelled above the racket.

"Quick!" Christoper said. "Chapin, Katie, join my power!"

"What?" Katie screamed.

Christoper grabbed Katie and he and Chapin and her stood a few feet apart. Chapin began to chant some strange words in a quiet voice, almost unheard around them. Suddenly, a barrier formed around them, and the fire swept past, leaving them unharmed. The knights scrambled away on their horses as fast as they could go.

"Hold hands!" Christoper screamed. "NOW!"

Katie did so, and she felt a surge of energy. Chapin began to chant louder and louder, until her

voice pierced the noise. Suddenly, all fell quiet. Even the knights at the town that had started the battle had stopped their attack. Suddenly, the barrier around the elementals disappeared, but they were unharmed. A drop of rain fell from the sky, and then two, and then a heavy deluge began. The knights watched as the fire winked out in the rain. As soon as the fire had been extinguished, the rain stopped, the sun came out, and everything returned to normal, except that there was silence. Christoper, Chapin, and Katie fell to the ground, exhausted.

"DO YOU BELIEVE US NOW?" Sean yelled loud enough for the guards to hear, breaking the intolerable silence.

"By all means," the guard replied. "Enter! We welcome you in the name of King Bahum!"

The rest of the group, which was now almost pressed back to the far woodlands by the fire, was reorganized by Sean and began to move forward. The burnt meadow crumpled beneath their feet. As they moved closer to the gates, they could see the town's knights bowing down to their presence.

When they had entered the town, the gates were sealed lest some other invading party try to take over, and every knight was hurriedly shown to a room. Since there weren't enough rooms in the town to accommodate them, everybody (except the elementals, of course) had to double up in a room.

Katie, Chapin, and Christopher were led to the King, while Mike and Dave were shown to a room, the knights unheeding of their pleas to stay with their friends. When they entered the throne room, all of the guards bowed down to their presence.

"Ah!" said the king in a loud, booming voice. "The great elementals who have been created to save the world!" He cleared his throat, and the noise seemed to echo around the room.

"Welcome to our town," said the king, continuing on in a loud voice. "I am not permitted to say the name, lest the great curse fall upon us," he said quieter.

Returning to his previous voice, he said, "I am King Bahum, ancestor of the great Patrick, who brought our kingdom into existence."

"We are pleased to meet you, your majesty," said Chapin, who was now standing in front of the others.

"Why do you come here?" said the king. "I apologize for my guards' behavior. They were too quick to pass judgement on you. There's so many thieves and bandits and Yavin's scum around here any more that it's hard to tell who to trust."

"We ask for assistance," said Chapin. "We are in dire need of food and supplies. We would like to be well prepared before we journey on to Yavin's fortress."

"Very well," said the king, pointing to his guards. "Show these guests to the great hall. Seat them in the places of honor for tonight's meal. And gather as much food as you can find so that they can leave us prepared."

"Thank you," said Chapin, and then turned to follow the guards out of the room. Christopher followed immediately behind her, and then Katie brought up the rear.

They exited the throne room and walked down a flight of stairs, at the foot of which two guards were posted. They bowed as the party passed. They slowly made their way across the lower balcony and down a few more flights of steps. When they had gotten down to one flight above the town level, they abruptly made a turn and saw a door leading into the massive structure. The guard entered, and the others followed.

That level was a huge hall, which largely resembled a cafeteria. There was a massive opening leading into the kitchen on the far wall, and from what they could see, it was clear that a great feast was in preparation. Back in the kitchen, the party could see every once in a while a cook walk by the door, some food or a strange utensil in her hands.

"Take anything you want," the guard motioned. He pointed to a table near the kitchen where there were assorted vegetables and fruits. "Supper will take place at dusk." The guard bowed, and then exited the room.

"Let's get something to eat," Katie said. "But don't forget Dave and Mike. They're probably starving."

"Yeah, let's sneak out a fruit or something, Chapin agreed, finally beginning to get used to Katie, Dave, and Mike' strange language.

They walked over to the table. There were some fruits on the table that resembled apples, but were blue in color and softer. On the right, there wasn't a single familiar vegetable. Although it seemed strange at first, Katie found herself enjoying the fruit.

When they were done, they set out to find Dave and Mike. This was a hard task, because when the knights were shown to rooms, there was no order as their coming had been unexpected. Nobody had documented where anybody was. Therefore, it took over an hour to find Dave and Mike's room.

When they knocked, they expected to find just another knight's room, but were surprised when Dave and Mike jumped up from the bed.

"We've been looking for you guys," Dave said startled. "We didn't find you anywhere around the town, so we came back here just a minute ago. We were going to have to debate what to do next."

"We're here," Katie announced. "And we brought some food."

"Good," Dave said. "I was starting to feel the effects of our deprivation."

"There's going to be a big feast at dark," Christopher commented, almost nonchalantly.

"That's good."

"Let's get some rest before we go to eat," Chapin suggested.

"Good idea," Dave replied.

They woke up when it was pitch dark. At first, everybody was afraid that they had missed the feast, but then they heard bells ringing, which, as they had heard before, meant that it was time for a meal.

They rushed out of the door and made it to the hall just behind the last few stragglers. When they were inside, the doors were closed. It was hot inside, not only because the night was hot, but also because of the poor ventilation. Although there were several large skylights that had the ability to be closed in case of rain, the heat did not relent.

The feast was phenomenal. Large stone tables had been brought into the hall since they were last there. All of the knights were able to sit inside because of the immense size of the hall. There was a table, on the far side of the hall, near the kitchen, that was raised above the others on a dais. The five were led there, after a bit of arguing about Mike and Dave. Sean was seated at the high table, along with several distinguished knights, and the King, who sat on a velvet chair with a plate so large that three normal people could eat their fill from it.

When everyone was seated, several women came out carrying more fruits and vegetables. A large plate was placed on the high table where Chapin, Christopher, Mike, Dave, and Katie sat. Although the rest of the hall didn't receive as much as they did, there certainly wasn't a shortage of food.

After the vegetables and fruits were eaten, the servants brought out enormous slabs of meat. Although nobody could figure out exactly what kind of meat it was, it was delicious and was completely eaten. There was no dessert. The king was helped back to his room after the meal, but the other guests stayed in the hall to converse.

Dave and Mike were in the middle of a casual conversation about the ups and downs of being caught in a different time when there was a loud shout from outside the hall. Suddenly, the big doors were thrown open and several guards rushed into the hall.

"What's wrong?" one of the other guards at the head table yelled.

"It's Yavin!" they said. "His servants are all over the town! We're trapped here!"

Immediately, the knights stood up and began to draw their swords. The women in the kitchen dropped their servings and ran back into the kitchen. The guards rushed toward the door to seal out the invaders. There was a bright flash of light outside and a house went up in smoke.

"They're torching the town!" one of the guards hollered with outrage. "Let's show them they can't defeat us!" He attempted to run outside, but two knights restrained him.

"We can't," one of them said. "They have over a thousand men. We're sorely outnumbered."

"EVERYBODY! SILENCE!" a voice roared. The chaos stopped. A few seconds later, the only

noise was the great doors being sealed with a large metal bolt.

"Stop your panic, you undertrained imbeciles," said the king, now standing. Several of the distinguished guests moved away from him as he banged his massive fist on the table, making a glass shatter.

"There's nothing we can gain by this senseless chaos," he said, now in a lower tone. "Gahdèn!" He pointed to one of the knights who had just finished closing the doors. It was now silent in the hall, the great doors blocking the noise, and the roof holes closed. "How many of them are there?"

"At least a thousand!" he replied. "They brought some sort of battering ram that broke down the doors. Then they rushed into the town. All the women and children are still in their houses. When I sealed the doors, there were still trolls and evil humans flooding them."

"I see," said the king, more quietly. "It would not be advisable to fight in these conditions. Does anybody have a better idea?"

"How much food do we have here?" inquired one of the knights from Sean's army.

The king motioned to one of the women, standing in the doorway to the kitchen. "Three days' worth," she said. "On strict rations. The hunting party was supposed to gather fruits and animals today, but I guess they were caught in the battle."

"Are you suggesting that we wait them out?" Christopher asked.

"No. Three days is not enough provisions to wait out a more well-equipped army. We would not be in fighting shape, either, after a few days of rations. But it may be a good idea to wait for tonight, and to see what happens."

There was silence in the hall, his words echoing throughout. Some torches on the wall cast eerie shadows over the group.

"Let's wait until tomorrow. Trolls can't fight as well in the daytime anyway, so we'll have an advantage there," suggested Chapin. "But for tonight, we should have at least ten guards awake around the room guarding the entrance and the holes in the roof."

"Let's rest," the king said. No sooner than he had said that than all the knights begin to make room for themselves on the floor of the hall. It was cramped with all of them there, and some lay on the tables and chairs to make room.

During the night, all was silent. Some of the guards slept, even to a point where there were only three or four awake. But it didn't matter at the moment. They could be awakened if something were to happen. So far, it was quiet. There was not a sound outside. Several times, they had even dared to open the great doors to look out, but there was not a troll in sight.

In the morning, when everyone awoke, the guards reported their findings to the king. Then they ate a small breakfast (to preserve rations if they were to stay here longer) and sat down for a brief meeting to discuss what to do.

This occurred at the end of breakfast. There was a loud bang from the king, and the guards yelled attention. The hall settled down to a dim murmur, and then to silence.

"Have there been any reports of activity through the night?" the king bellowed. All of the guards reported the same: there was not a sound.

"Then it may be safe to send a scout," the king continued. "We need to know if Yavin's followers are hiding out in the town, or have plundered it and left."

"That sounds like a good idea," Christopher said, "but who are you going to send as a scout?"

"Yes...it would have to be someone who is small, can run quickly, doesn't have full armor on... What about one of your companions?" He pointed toward Dave, Mike, and Katie.

"Mike, you're the smallest here," Christopher asked. "Would you be willing to be our spy?"

Mike hesitated for a moment. He wanted to be a help to them, but he was afraid of Yavin. What if he were captured? The curious side of him won over, though, and he ended up answering yes.

Christopher, the king and Mike had a quiet talk. Mike was only to walk outside the hall and around the ledge, and then report his findings to the knights inside. If he spotted Yavin's servants, he was to alert the knights, who would decide what to do next. If he did not, a larger search party would set out

to assess the damage and be sure that there were no lingering trolls.

After wishing him good luck, the king sent Mike to the door. The guards at the door opened it cautiously, in case something were to jump in. The entire hall watched as Mike went out the doors, through the small tunnel, and turned left onto the wide ledge that surrounded the hall.

Mike noticed nothing unusual outside at first. The town appeared normal below, and there was not a troll, calk, or other gruesome thing in sight. Suddenly, as he turned the corner, there was a loud noise. From nowhere five trolls appeared.

One growled maliciously. Mike turned around and began to run, but not before he noticed the smouldering ruins in the background. The trolls began pursuit. He rushed back to the main gate to the hall, but the doors were locked! He pounded as hard as he could, but they didn't open. Looking back, he saw the trolls only feet away. He pounded more and more, and finally heard the bolt coming undone, but it was too late. The trolls were upon him.